



Interview Summary: Serge Arpin, City of Ottawa

Background

Serge Arpin joined Mayor Jim Watson's office as chief of staff in December 2010. His role is to liaise between the Mayor and members of Ottawa City Council (the "**Council**") and between the Mayor and the administration of the City of Ottawa (the "**City**").

Mr. Arpin was interviewed by Jean-Simon Schoenholz and Sajeda Hedaraly on September 8, 2022. Questions about this summary should be directed to Jean-Simon Schoenholz.

Discussions with Mr. Dean French and negotiations with the protesters

On February 10 or 11, 2022, Mr. Arpin contacted Mr. Dean French, former chief of staff to Ontario premier Doug Ford, following a call between Mayor Watson and Mr. French during which Mr. French had offered to facilitate discussions with the protesters. Mr. Arpin had had some conversations with Mr. French in his former role in the Premier's office and felt that he was a serious and credible person. During his first call with Mr. French, Mr. Arpin told him that he assumed the majority of protesters did not want to cause any harm to Ottawa residents. Therefore, he suggested that if Mr. French were to persuade the Convoy organizers to remove the trucks from residential areas, a meeting between the protesters and Mayor Watson might be possible.

On February 12, 2022, an agreement was reached with the protesters, who promised to remove 75% of the trucks from residential areas. Mr. Arpin had several conversations with Mr. French, including an in-person meeting, to finalize the details of the agreement. Mr. Arpin spoke only with Mr. French and held no discussions with protesters. The Mayor did not take part in the discussions between Mr. French and Mr. Arpin.

Per the agreement, some vehicles would be relocated to Wellington Street. The City's understanding was that some protesters wanted to leave entirely and that others would relocate to sites outside the city (for instance, Vankleek Hill). According to the City, it was understood that the agreement was not a permanent solution, but it was nevertheless considered a short-term victory for residents overwhelmed by the protests.

On February 13, 2022, some senior members of the Ottawa Police Service (the "**OPS**"), including Chief Peter Sloly, Deputy Chief Steve Bell and Superintendent Rob Drummond, were advised of the content of the agreement. They shared no concerns about the plan. Furthermore, during a meeting with some senior OPS members, they stated that the agreement could ease tensions with the protesters and increase the police's capacity to respond, since they would have a smaller footprint to manage. Also, it was Mr. Arpin's understanding that Superintendent Drummond took part in a meeting where he was involved in elaborating the plan's details with Mr. Kanellakos, a meeting in which Mr. Arpin was not involved. According to Mr. Arpin, there is no doubt that Deputy Chief Bell and



Superintendent Drummond were aware that a number of vehicles would be added to Wellington Street. Chief Sloly was advised of the agreement during a meeting whose attendees included Kim Ayotte, General Manager of the City's Emergency and Protective Services, and Mr. Kanellakos.¹ He also received, by email, a copy of the letter from Mayor Watson to the Convoy organizers confirming the agreement.² The agreement was announced to Council members that day.

On February 14, 2022, the protesters began moving the trucks with the support of the OPS. In the afternoon, according to the information provided to Mr. Arpin and for reasons unknown to him, the OPS ended the operation. It was his understanding that approximately 102 vehicles (roughly 25% of the vehicles) had been moved in the meantime, including approximately 40 heavy trucks.

Mr. Arpin was not involved in the negotiations between City Manager Steve Kanellakos and the protesters. To his recollection, those conversations began before Mr. French contacted the Mayor and were eventually incorporated into the negotiations being conducted by Mr. French.

Discussions with the federal government

During the protests, Mr. Arpin had exchanges with the Prime Minister's Office, the office of Minister Bill Blair, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness,³ and the office of Minister Marco Mendicino, Minister of Public Safety.⁴

According to Mr. Arpin, the Mayor was hesitant to contact the provincial and federal governments to ask for additional resources for the OPS since it was a police matter. However, the OPS and the Ottawa Police Services Board (the "**OPSB**") requested the Mayor's help because they felt political pressure was required to get the resources that they considered necessary. That was the context in which Mayor Watson sent a letter to the provincial and federal governments on February 7, 2022.

On February 9, 2022, during a telephone conversation, Mr. Arpin told Ms. Samantha Khalil, Director of Issues Management and Parliamentary Affairs in the Prime Minister's

¹ See Kim Ayotte's handwritten notes, **OTT00010464**.

² See email exchange between Chief Sloly and Mr. Kanellakos, February 13, 2022, **OTT00006985**.

³ Text messages between Serge Arpin and Zita Astravas, Chief of Staff to Minister Blair, February 7, 2022 to February 20, 2022, **OTT00020712**.

⁴ Text messages between Serge Arpin and Mike Jones, Chief of Staff to Minister Marco Mendicino, February 11, 2022 to February 20, 2022, **OTT00030055**.



Office, that the City did not feel support from the federal government, as federal ministers were doing nothing but criticizing the police response in Ottawa. He asked Ms. Khalil if it would be possible to use more collaborative language. In Mr. Arpin's opinion, the tone used by the federal government improved following that conversation.⁵

The same day, Mr. Arpin told Ms. Zita Astravas, Chief of Staff to Minister Blair, that a meeting between the Mayor and Ontario Solicitor General Sylvia Jones had not gone well.⁶ Ms. Jones had told the Mayor that the Province of Ontario would not be participating in a political roundtable.

On February 11 and 12, 2022, Mr. Arpin exchanged several text messages with Mr. Mike Jones, Chief of Staff to Minister Mendicino, regarding the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (the "**RCMP**") resources deployed by the federal government to assist the OPS.⁷ Mr. Arpin received contradictory information from the federal government and the OPS about the number of RCMP officers deployed to Ottawa, and he informed Mr. Jones about it. Mr. Arpin still does not know why the federal government and the OPS had different information about the number of RCMP officers under OPS command. Mr. Arpin thinks that the number of RCMP officers that the federal government said it contributed included resources assigned to Ottawa who were not under OPS command (for instance, the officers assigned to the Prime Minister's residence or the parliamentary precinct).

During these exchanges, Mr. Jones also told Mr. Arpin that there seemed to be a delay in swearing in the RCMP officers. According to the information Mr. Arpin received from the OPS, there was no such delay.

On February 15, 2022, Mr. Arpin asked Ms. Astravas to identify the RCMP commanding officer who would be assigned to Ottawa.⁸ This request was made in a context in which little information was circulating about the end of the protests. According to Mr. Arpin, the City had been asking the federal government for resources since February 7, 2022, and had just learned, a few days previously, that the police forces could not agree on an action plan.

The same day, Mr. Arpin told Mr. Jones that the Province of Ontario had advised the City of the identity of the Ontario Provincial Police (the "**OPP**") commander who would be

⁵ OTT00007430.

⁶ See text messages between Serge Arpin and Zita Astravas, February 7, 2022 to February 20, 2022, **OTT00020712**.

⁷ Text messages between Serge Arpin and Mike Jones, February 11, 2022 to February 12, 2022, **OTT00030055**.

⁸ See text messages between Serge Arpin and Zita Astravas, February 7, 2022 to February 20, 2022, **OTT00020712**.



assigned to Ottawa.⁹ Mr. Jones told Mr. Arpin that he had asked the Deputy Chief of the RCMP to contact him directly. Mr. Arpin wanted to convey this information to Mayor Watson.

According to Mr. Arpin, the RCMP officers began arriving in Ottawa in greater numbers on February 16 or 17, 2022. Mr. Arpin does not know the reason for the delay in deploying those resources.

Discussions with the provincial government

During the protests, Mr. Arpin had a few short calls with Mr. James Wallace, Chief of Staff to Premier Ford. Mr. Arpin thinks that these calls took place on or around February 7 and 16. One purpose of these calls was to ask for the Province's help to mobilize police resources. Mr. Wallace expressed concerns about OPS leadership. Mr. Wallace told Mr. Arpin that the Province also had to address the situation in Windsor.

During these calls, Mr. Arpin briefly mentioned the City's need for tow trucks. Mr. Arpin and Mr. Wallace also discussed OPSB-related governance issues.

Discussions with Councillor Diane Deans

On February 12, 2022, Mr. Arpin exchanged WhatsApp messages with Ms. Diane Deans, City Councillor and Chair of the OPSB, in which Mr. Arpin notably stated: "[w]e will have to work hard to defeat a motion asking Peter [Sloly] to resign on Monday."¹⁰ Mr. Arpin was unaware of any specific motions that would be brought forward asking Chief Sloly to resign, but he was aware of the frustrations of several Council members and was anticipating that such a motion would be introduced at the next Council meeting. Councillor Deans never told Mr. Arpin that she had lost confidence in Chief Sloly.

On February 15, 2022, Councillor Deans announced Chief Sloly's resignation and appeared to announce the hiring of a new police chief.¹¹

On February 16, 2022, at around 10:30 a.m., Mr. Arpin took part in a telephone meeting with Mayor Watson and Councillor Deans. During that call, Councillor Deans told Mayor Watson that a new chief of the OPS, Mr. Matthew Torigian, had been hired. Mayor Watson expressed his strong disagreement with that decision, since it would result

⁹ Text messages between Serge Arpin and Mike Jones, February 11, 2022 to February 12, 2022, **OTT00030055**.

¹⁰ Text messages between Serge Arpin and Diane Deans, February 10, 2022 to February 15, 2022, **OTT00024082**.

¹¹ OTT00029698.



in a third police chief in the span of three days and would destabilize the OPS. Also, the OPS had never hired a police chief without a public process. According to Mr. Arpin, Councillor Deans told the Mayor and Mr. Arpin that she would not sign the new chief's contract without the Mayor's agreement. During that meeting, Mayor Watson told Councillor Deans that he had not decided whether he still had confidence in her.

Later that same day, Mr. Arpin learned from a member of the city administration that the new chief's contract had been signed, despite the assurances Councillor Deans had given that morning. Mr. Arpin told Mayor Watson about it, and the Mayor concluded that he had lost confidence in Councillor Deans. Before the Council meeting, and at the request of Councillor Deans, Mr. Arpin informed Councillor Deans, as a courtesy, that a motion would be debated that evening to remove her from her position as chair of the OPSB. Councillor Deans responded that the decision would be made at the Council meeting.

Conclusion

Mr. Arpin is of the opinion that more effective multi-jurisdictional collaboration might have resulted in resources being provided more quickly.